



# NEWS RELEASE

## Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests Thunder Basin National Grassland

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr/news>

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### National Grassland Week Thunder Basin National Grassland

(Douglas, June 16, 2009) – Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack proclaimed June 14 - 20 as National Grasslands Week to celebrate the valuable role of National Grasslands in the United States. The Forest Service administers 20 National Grasslands with only one in Wyoming.

The Thunder Basin National Grassland encompasses the wide open spaces of northeastern Wyoming in the Powder River Basin, between the Big Horn Mountains and the Black Hills. The Grassland is the second largest grassland at 572,000 acres with elevations from 3,600 feet to 5,200 feet. It has a semi-arid climate. Thunder Basin is administered by the Douglas Ranger District. Specialists in the areas of wildlife, range, water, soils, vegetation, timber, recreation, archaeology, paleontology, engineering, minerals, and land acquisition all work together to improve the health and use of the land and resources.

Land patterns are very complex because of intermingled federal, state, and private lands. Over 100,000 acres of private and federal lands have been exchanged in the past ten years, resulting in public grassland consolidation that improves federal land management.

Archaeological surveys of approximately 200,000 acres identified 1,100 prehistoric and historic sites. The records describe stone circles from Native American encampments, prehistoric and historic trails, historic wagon roads, and pioneer homesteads.



Hiking, wildlife watching, sightseeing, hunting, and fishing keep recreationists busy. Peaceful dispersed campsites are available all over the Grassland, and there are no developed campgrounds. Several reservoirs are stocked with small mouthed bass and trout, allowing year-round fishing. Miles of hiking and dirt bike trails wind through the hills and plains, and over 1,000 miles of low standard roads challenge four-wheel-drive vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, and motorbikes.



The Grassland is a haven for eagles, raptors, deer, elk, antelope, and many other wildlife species. The elk herd is one of the last herds left on a grassland. Studies of Thunder Basin Ferruginous hawks contribute to international migration research. Two animals that live on the Grassland, the greater sage grouse and black-tailed prairie dog, are under consideration for listing as threatened and endangered species. Two plants, Ute's Ladies Tresses and Blowout Penstemon, are threatened and endangered species that are found on the Grassland.

Thunder Basin has the second largest grazing program on a Grassland. Three grazing associations have agreements with the Grassland. The grazing associations hold permits for 156 grazing members, or ranchers, who actually graze their sheep and cattle year-round on the Grassland.

Thunder Basin has some of the richest fossil fuel deposits in the nation. Vast mineral resources, such as oil, gas, and coal, lie under the Grassland and five large

world class coal mines extract this energy for the country. The Black Thunder Coal Mine is one of the largest and most productive surface coal mines in the world covering 44,000 acres of forest service administered lands.

The Grassland has some of the highest potential for private-sector development of solar and wind energy resources. New transmission line construction has increased access to the grid across the State.

Thunder Basin National Grassland is a valuable contributor to the economy and natural resources of the United States. Remember National Forests and Grasslands are public lands owned by all citizens, so please take care of your National Forest. For more information, visit [www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr) or contact the Douglas Ranger District at (307) 358-4690.

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